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DEBATES AND DISCUSSIONS IN ANCIENT KASHMIR

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Academic debates and discussions formed an important part of education in ancient India. Vedic sages honoured a victor in such academic debates.[1] The Upaniṣads contain various references to such debates. In the philosophical debate held under the auspices of king Janaka, the sage Yājñavalkya had to face a lady philosopher Gārgī Vācaknavī whose self-confidence is remarkable. She enters into a keen debate with Yājñavalkya who just silences her by saying "O Gārgī, you should not ask too much lest your head should fall off. Verily, you are asking too much about a divinity about which we are not to ask too much." At this, Gārgī stops questioning and allows others to have a chance of participating in the discussion. But when she finds that all have failed in defeating Yājñavalkya she rises again with a challenging spirit and says, "like a warrior of Kāśī or Videha rising up with two foe-piercing arrows in his hands, I have risen up against you with two questions."[2]

In the famous work on Āyurveda namely *Carakasaṁhitā*, which was most probably written in Kashmir, we find minute details about holding of academic debates. Such a debate or discussion, it points out, promotes the power of application of knowledge, manifests the clarity of knowledge, augments the power of speech, spreads fame, eliminates doubts which remain after a previous study, brings about confirmation of what is undoubtedly understood before. Therefore, participation in academic debates is applauded by the wise.

In this work, details are given about friendly discussions as well as hostile discussions. In debates held under friendly atmosphere where the participants are intelligent but not jealous, one need not get worried about being defeated. One should

not rejoice if the opponent is defeated and should not boast before others about such victory. One should not hold extreme views; one should try to bring round the other party with politeness.[3] In hostile discussion where one tries to defeat the other party, the participants have to determine the superiority or inferiority of themselves in respect of their opponents. The attitude of the members of the assembly has also to be carefully examined. It is this proper observation which makes intelligent participants determine the time of entering into or giving up the discussion. Good qualities of participants are the knowledge of the text, practical experience, power of retention, presence of mind and power of speech, while bad qualities are irritation, lack of clarity, cowardice, lack of power of retention and carelessness.[4]

As regards assembly, it can be enlightened or dull. It can be friendly or neutral or prejudiced. Agniveśa does not advise any scholar to enter into a discussion with any body if the members of the assembly are prejudiced.[5] If the members of the assembly are favourable or neutral, the discussion should be held. If the opponent is of superior category then one should not enter into discussion on the same topic. Without letting the assembly know, one should change the topic of discussion to a favourable one. If the opponent is of inferior category then efforts should be made to defeat him immediately. Various methods have been suggested to defeat such an opponent who lacks one or the other quality of a good debater. If he lacks learning, he should be defeated by citing long *sūtras*; if he lacks practical experience then by such words and sentences as are difficult to understand; if he has weak memory, then by complicated and long *sūtras*; if he lacks presence of mind then by statements carrying more than one meaning; if he is devoid of the power of oration then by challenging with half of a sentence; if he has no experience of participation in seminars, then by creating difficult situations for him; and if he is not careful then by adhering to the discipline of discussion.[6] That form of discussion in which one argues in favour of one's own proposition and contradicts the opponent is called *jalpa*, while the other form in which only the opponent's

views are contradicted without supporting one's own view is called *vitaṇḍā*.[7]

Regarding rules of debate, these points have to be decided first: (1) Things which should be stated; (2) Things which should not be stated; (3) The point of defeat.

The point of defeat is reached when a statement is repeated three times but the opponent is not able to understand that, if he enquires about something which ought not to be enquired or does not enquire which ought to be enquired. Moreover shift from one's own stand, confessional retort, irrelevant reasoning, irrelevant statement, defiance of the temporal order, causal fallacy etc. are called *nigrahasthāna*.[8]

The detailed description of all such rules about the technique of discussion indicates that this art was well developed in ancient India. It is, however, interesting to know that references to such debates occur not only in books on religion, philosophy and technical sciences such as *Carakasaṁhitā* but also in general literature including Sanskrit poetry and drama. I will refer to a few such works produced in ancient Kashmir.

In all the *Mahākāvyas*, descriptions of wars are found and before the decision about war is taken, a discussion generally takes place amongst the courtiers of the hero-king.

In the *Kapphiṇābhyudaya* of Śivasvāmin, Kapphiṇa's minister Subāhu presses upon the need to attack the enemy immediately. He is not in favour of thinking much about polity.[9] *Nīti*, according to him, is the mother of those who are cowards and is of no use for one who wants to get victory.[10] Nala Suśarmā, Pavana and Śatadhvaja agree with him but there is one Bhīṣmaka who points out the importance of *nīti* along with that of war. The great men, he argues, are cabable of being angry and tolerant at the same time just as the ocean bears water as well as fire simultaneously.[11]

In the *Haravijaya* of Ratnākara, the ministers of Śiva react to the message of Andhaka about war. Śiva asks as to which methods should be adopted to get back the area occupied by the enemy. A discussion amongst the gaṇas follows. Prabhāmaya points out that any such action as war should be taken up after proper consideration.[12] Aṭṭahāsa's opinion is

that it is necessary to know fully the strength of the enemy before attacking him. One should wait for proper time and proper means.[13] Caṇḍeśvara, however, favours war to be started immediately. Puṣpahāsa contradicts Caṇḍeśvara and points out that the war should be the last resort and one should first try other methods.[14] Agnidanṣṭra wants to start war immediately.[15] Nandisena also favours *daṇḍa* to *sāma* and *bheda* in this respect and gives the argument that he got authority by eradicating all; so it is not possible to persuade him by dialogues. The kings belonging to his *maṇḍala* are deadly against the gods; so it is not possible to create dissension amongst them. War is the only way left out.[16]

These references from the *Mahākāvyas* being of conventional type do not represent debates from real life. But such references occur in dramas also which are nearer to real life. Kashmir most probably had produced many Sanskrit plays. The *Nīlamata Purāṇa* refers to prekṣāgṛha and praises the act of arranging dramatic performances at religious and social functions.[17] Kalhaṇa refers to a dramatist Candraka who had written plays for all sections of the society, and his works were so popular that he was considered an incarnation of Vyāsa.[18] But the only plays of Kashmirian writers which are available are *Pādatāḍitaka* of Śyāmilaka, *Āgamaḍambara* of Jayanta Bhaṭṭa and *Karṇasundarī* of Bilhaṇa. Out of these three, the first two plays contain significant references to debates. *Pādatāḍitaka*, as pointed by Prof. Burrow, seems to have been written in the 5th century A.D. It describes the story of one Viṣṇunāga, son of a Mahāmātra. One prostitute Madanasenā wanted to allow him but the simple fellow did not respond. She placed her foot on his head but he instead of being obliged for this favour felt insulted and went to the meeting of the Brāhmaṇas to get their injunctions for *prāyaścitta*. The Brāhmaṇas well versed in law books listened to his story and expressed their ignorance about the *prāyaścitta* of such a great sin as being hit on head by the foot of a prostitute. One Bhavasvāmī advised him to go to the assembly of the Viṭas. The meeting is called at the house of Viṭamahattara Bhaṭṭijīmūta.[19]

The Viṭas are disappointed to know that Madanasenā, a

prostitute of such a high status, did not identify a proper person before obliging him. They seemed to be in a thoughtful mood and then the discussion started. A Viṭa pointed out the oath that whosoever spoke any thing irrelevant shall never win in gambling, shall have to be obedient to parents, be satisfied with milk and sweets, be faithful to his wife, be pacified at the advent of old age, shall serve the teachers and shall be dismissed from the assembly of Viṭas. Fourteen Viṭas participate in the discussion before the final decision is taken. Dhāvaki Anatatha's opinion is that Madanasenā should not have placed her foot—the foot whose stroke makes the Aśoka tree blossom and which is the abode of Kāmadeva—on the worthless head of this animal. Therefore, it is Madanasenā and not Viṣṇunāga who is to be punished.

Śyāmilaka supports this view by saying that Madanasenā's behaviour has been like that of a fool who plays on Vīṇā before a donkey or sings a song of praise before a monkey. Mallasvāmī also accuses Madanasenā for this action. The poet Sibirakṣita, who is always ready to sell his poem for a glass of wine, considers Viṣṇunāga's head as unworthy of receiving the touch of Madanasenā's foot and hence fit to get punishement. Bhavakīrti suggests that Madanasenā should drag Viṣṇunāga catching him by his hair and afterwards should fasten him with her girdle. Gāndharvamenaka does not consider Visṇunāga's feet so worthy as to receive the touch of Madanasenā's girdle.

The poet Āryaka suggested the use of her earring for beating the accused but Hastimūrkha from Gāndhāra opposes this idea. Gupta and Maheśvaradatta suggested that Viṣṇunāga should wash his head with the left-overs of the water after washing Madanasenā's feet. Traividya opposes this view. Viṣṇunāga is not worthy of even drinking that water. How could he be allowed to wash his feet with that ?

A Viṭa from Sauvīra suggests that Viṣṇunāga should stand holding a mirror for Madanasenā when she combs her hair.

The poet Rudravarmā suggests that Viṣṇunāga's head be shaved clean while Bhaṭṭijīmūta suggests that Viṣṇunāga should refrain from oiling his hair. Śyāmilaka in the end suggests that

as Madansenā and Viṣṇunāga both are to be punished, so Madanasenā should be asked to place her foot on the head of Śyāmilaka and Viṣṇunāga should go on looking at her.[20] In another incident we find the Viṭas discussing the quality of the dance performance given by Mayūrasenā. Many other spectators find fault with that performance while Hariśūdra favours her. Hariśūdra's opinion, being based on the treatises, is acceped by the judges who announce reward for her.[21]

The most significant details about academic debates are found in the *Āgamaḍambara* of Jayanta Bhaṭṭa (10th century A.D.) of Kashmir.[22] Jayanta belonged to a family of Vedic scholars of Bhāradvāja *gotra*. He wrote the *Nyāyamañjarī*, a famous work on *Nyāya* and the play, *Āgamaḍambara*.

Written with an academic purpose, this play has various debates and discussions interwoven in the story and ends with a conference addressed by Dhairyarāśi Saṅkarṣaṇa. Various technical terms concerning the art of debating like *sabhā*, *goṣṭhī*, *vivāda*, *vādī*, *prathamapakṣa*, *pūrvapakṣa*, *parīkṣaka*, *prāśnika*, *stheya*, *sabhya*, *hetu*, *nigraha*, *jalpa*, *vivādapadanirṇetā*[23] are used. Judges are appointed either by the debaters themselves as in the debate in the Act I or by some high authority as in the Act IV where we find queen Sugandhā suggesting the name of a great Naiyāyika Dhairyarāśi to act as judge in the conference of the Vaidikas and followers of other sects. In all the four acts of this play, we find academic debates and discussions. In the Act I teacher Saṁkarṣaṇa, along with one young student, visits a Buddhist Vihāra, where he finds the Buddhist teacher Dharmottara teaching his pupil. He feels that all his study of the Vedas, Vedāṅgas and Mīmāṁsā will be useful only if he defeats in academic discussions all those who are opposed to the Vedas.[24] With this aim in view he interrupts Dharmottara's discourse and asks his student as to what he has been taught by his teacher. On receiving the reply that he has been taught four truths, Saṁkarṣaṇa says that all that teaching in which the existence of soul is denied is worthless. The Buddhist student rebuffs him by pointing out that people like him only can regard

sacrifices wherein animals are killed as means of attaining good.

Saṁkarṣaṇa wants to start discussion but there is no use of debating before the group of Bhikṣus who are prejudiced. There must be some independent persons to listen to the debate and give the decision. Then he sees some prominent scholars like Viśvarūpa who had come there incidentally to see the garden.[25] He requests them to be judges and decide as to whose statement carries weight. He says, "Here am I and here is this Bhikṣu. You, possessed of intelligence, be observers in deciding as to what is substantial and what is worthless. Where can one get such an opportunity ?"[26] The visitors accept the offer on the condition that the debate should be carried on with proper decorum and in accordance with rules. Three terms, *prāśnika*, *parīkṣaka* and *sabhya*, have been used here for judges, which indicate the qualities of interrogation, observation and acceptability by the society. They are ready to be the judges if the contestants behave like good people and observe the following rules:

1. Statements should be made in a befitting manner (nyāyyam).
2. Statements should be brief (parimitam).
3. Statements should be based on principles (siddhānta-bījam).
4. Deceitful interpretation, improper reply and argument just for the sake of defeating should be avoided.
5. There should be no enmity in hearts.
6. There should be no rudeness in talk.
7. There should be no frowning on faces.[27]

Both the contestants accept these conditions and the debate starts. The judges ask as to who will put forth his views first. Saṁkarṣaṇa states that as the Buddhist Bhikṣu has already put forth his proposition while teaching his students which Saṅkarṣaṇa has heard, the latter should be allowed to attack those propositions. On being asked as to what he heard, Saṁkarṣaṇa gives a summary of the Buddhist views about the word. This is approved by Dharmottara. Then Saṁkarṣaṇa attacks the *kṣaṇabhaṅga* theory saying that it lacks argument. While

Dharmottara argues that every thing is momentary but it becomes the cause of the birth of something else, Saṁkarṣaṇa points out the impossibility of the relationship of cause and effect between two momentary objects. The heated discussion about the *kṣaṇabhaṅga* theory ends with the argument of Saṁkarṣaṇa.

The pupils of both the contestants get excited and are ready to attack each other physically. Thanks to the wisdom of judges and the contestants, they intervene and the untoward fight is averted. When Saṁkarṣaṇa wants to elaborate his point further, the judges consider it unnecessary and direct them to start the discussion about *vijñānavāda.* Dharmottara had pointed out earlier that there was nothing except knowledge which itself appeared to assume various forms. Saṁkarṣaṇa puts forth the question as to whether *jñānātmā* manifests its own form or that of something else. When one says, "I am not blue," does it not indicate that he is different from blue ?[28]

In the Act II we find Jinarakṣita of the *kṣapaṇaka* school avoiding a discussion with Saṁkarṣaṇa. Jinarakṣita is expounding the teachings to his pupils. As soon as Saṁkarṣaṇa enters and enquires his well-being Jinarakṣita, well acquainted with the debating powers of Saṁkarṣaṇa, becomes nervous and sees wisdom in retiring from the scene. He says, "This *snātaka* Saṁkarṣaṇa, after defeating the Bauddhas, has come with an intention to defeat us. His strength is unbearable, his power of speech and intelligence are unequalled. It is better to run away from this place."

But Saṁkarṣaṇa would not let him escape so easily. He puts a simple question : "What is the present topic under discussion ?"[29] Bhikṣu replies that they are trying to find out some ways of crossing this world. *Snātaka* then gives a summary of the means of salvation as propounded in Jaina school and asks as to what particular point Jinarakṣita was explaining to his students. When Jinarakṣita says that it was *anekāntavāda*, Saṁkarṣaṇa raises objections against this theory. Jinarakṣita finding no answer, throws a hint to his pupil who requests his teacher to move out as some Bhikṣus are waiting for him. With this excuse Jinarakaṣita leaves along with his pupils.

The pupil of Saṁkarṣaṇa lauds his teacher by saying that one dares not stand before him in the warfield of discussion.

Saṁkarṣaṇa here points out that the aim of discussion is to find out the real facts. It is also pointed out here that a softly spoken proper statement wins the heart of those engaged in discussion.[30]

In the Act III we find an assembly of scholars at the Śaiva *Āśrama* of Dharmaśiva.[31] A materialist named Vṛddhāmbhi comes there to convince the scholars that austerities are various types of self-torture, and-self-restraint is nothing but starving oneself of all enjoyments. Religious duties like performance of sacrifice etc. are childish actions.[32] God is nothing but a creation of imagination. A very lively debate follows in which Dharmaśiva tries to prove the existence of Īśvara with the help of the process of inference (*anumāna*) but Vṛddhāmbhi does not accept *anumāna* as a *pramāṇa.* He is then attacked with the argument that *pratyakṣa pramāṇa* alone is not sufficient for all activities of man. When hungry and thirsty a person takes food and water and not sand and fire. One does so on the basis of inference based on previous experience. Dharmaśiva says, "A woman, a child, a cowherd and even you yourself certainly apprehend unperceived objects on the basis of perceived ones."[33] Vṛddhāmbhi, however, holds that such actions are done through inner perception just as in the case of animals.

In the Act IV we get information that thousands of Bhāgavatas and Vedic Brāhmaṇas have gathered to decide as to whether or not the Bhāgavatas should be included within the pale of Brahmanism.[34] Scholars in Mīmāṁsā, Vyākaraṇa, Nyāya, Smṛti, Purāṇa etc. have assembled to thrash out this problem and find a solution.[35] We are further informed that the queen Sugandhā has nominated the famous Naiyāyika Dhairyarāśi as umpire in the debate.[36] Qualities of Dhairyarāśi as a judge have been mentioned by Saṁkarṣaṇa and Mañjīra. Some one sings in praise of Dhairyarāśi. Due to his various qualities Dhairgarāśi is not opposed by the people.[37] Saṁkarṣaṇa appoves it by remarking that he deserves confidence of the people which they have placed in him.[38] Mañjīra, while

making an announcement regarding his appointment as umpire by the king, refers to his qualities. He is described as a good orator, possessed of sharp intellect, honoured by good people, an ocean of streams of studies and recognized as the best of all scholars in the assembly of educated people. It is further stated that he has accepted the position of umpire at the request of scholars and at the behest of the king, so that all the subjects, giving up conflicting views, be at peace and enjoy themselves.[39] It appears that Dhairyarāśi had already heard the various points of view regardig the problem and that big meeting was held to listen to his analysis of the problem along with his judgement. It is he who delivers a lengthy speech presenting a summary of the arguments and counterarguments. The problem of apparent contradiction in various Āgamas is solved by saying that all these are like different doors to a single house. The approaches may differ but the goal is one and the same, namely, salvation.[40] As there is only one God, He by his own appears as Paśupati, Kapila, Viṣṇu, Saṁkarṣaṇa, Jina, Buddha and Manu to teach various Āgamas.[41] He favours the view that all such Āgamas which do not teach repelling practices should be regarded authoritative without raising the question of their origin. When his speech is over, he asks if all the listeners are satisfied. Saṁkarṣaṇa again praises him thus: what an acute discernment, what a fluency of speech, what a mastery over the Śāstras and what a mind devoid of defects like jealousy. There is no dectrine which has not attained its highest peak in him. The world announces incessantly that there is no one equal to him.[42]

Thus these plays indicate that the society of Kashmir from 5th to 10th century A.D., which was comprised of various Vaidika and Avaidika sects, had confrontations with one another but generally these confrontations took the form of academic debates and discussions which observed certain set rules and regulations.

NOTES

1. *Ṛgveda*, 8.71.10
2. *Bṛ. Up.*, 3
3. *Carakasaṁhitā*, Vimānasthāna, Chap 8, Sections 16, 17.
4. *Ibid.*, section 18.
5. *Ibid.*, section 20.
6. *Ibid.*, section 21.
7. *Ibid.*, section 28.
8. *Ibid.*, section 65.
9. *Kapphiṇābhyudaya*, 4. 23
10. *Ibid.*, 4.26.
11. *Ibid.*, 5. 27, 37.
12. *Haravijaya*, 9. 23.
13. *Ibid.*, 12. 25
14. *Ibid.*, 14. 56-57
15. *Ibid.*, 11. 29
16. *Ibid* 15. 42, 44.
17. *Nīlamatapurāṇa Vol. II*. 224, *pp*. 731.
18. *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, 2. 16.
19. *Pādatāḍitaka* in *Śṛṅgārahāṭa*, *pp*. 181 ff.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
22. *Āgamaḍambara*, ed. V. Raghavan, 1964.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 79; 76; 79; 97; 16; 15; 79; 16; 18; 16; 77; 79.
24. *Ibid.*, Act 1, 17.
25. *Ibid.*, Act 1, p. 15.
26. *Ibid.*, Act 1, 24.
27. *Ibid.*, Act 1, 25.
28. *Ibid.*, Act 1, 38.
29. *Ibid.*, Act 1, 39.
30. *Ibid.*, Act 1, 40.
31. *Ibid.*, Act 2, 12.
32. *Ibid.*, Act 3, p. 56.
33. *Ibid.*, Act 3, 9.
34. *Ibid.*, Act 3, 22.
35. *Ibid.*, Act 4, p. 76.

36. *Ibid.*, Act 4, p. 79.
37. *Ibid.*, Act 4, 12.
38. *Ibid.*, Act 4, p. 80.
39. *Ibid.*, Act 4, 13.
40. *Ibid.*, Act 4, 52.
41. *Ibid.*, Act 4, 57.
42. *Ibid.*, Act 4, 104.